

VZCZCXYZ0000
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBU #0795/01 1882147
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 072147Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 4027
INFO RUCNMER/MERCOSUR COLLECTIVE
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC

UNCLAS BUENOS AIRES 000795

SIPDIS
SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [AR](#)
SUBJECT: Argentina: Keeping Score on the Pollsters

REF: Buenos Aires 0750

1. (SBU) Summary: Most Argentine polling firms did not foresee former President Nestor Kirchner and his Victory Front (FpV) slate's second-place finish in the June 28 election in Buenos Aires province. Only four polling firms (Poliarquia, Giacobbe, Isonomia, and Management and Fit) accurately predicted that the Pro Union, led by Peronist dissident and multimillionaire Francisco de Narvaez, would beat the FpV. The firms most off base in their projections -- giving Kirchner 5 to 8.5 points over de Narvaez -- were Analogias, Ricardo Rouvier, Ibarometro, and Public Opinion Studies Center (CEOP). Argentine media often report "polls" conducted by new, unknown pollsters as if they had equal standing with more reliable firms, making it difficult to sort out contradictory poll results. In that vein, we regard recent efforts by "Noticias" to rank pollsters as a positive step forward, and we offer this report card to help assess future polls. End Summary.

2. (SBU) In the run-up to Argentina's June 28 midterm congressional elections, the majority of polling firms put former President Nestor Kirchner (NK) and the ruling Victory Front (FpV) slightly ahead of political rival and first-place winner Francisco de Narvaez of the Republican Proposal/Peronist dissident alliance, Union-PRO. A long list of pollsters, including Ricardo Rouvier and Associates, Public Opinion Studies Center (CEOP), Analogias, Ibarometro, and Equis, were off the mark, predicting since May a victory for the FpV in the key race of Buenos Aires province. Analogias (Analia del Franco), Ricardo Rouvier, Ibarometro (Doris Capurro), and CEOP (Roberto Bacman) were among the firms most off base in their projections, each giving a margin of victory to the FpV ranging from 5 to 8.5 points. In the end, the Union-PRO slate came out ahead of the FpV by a 2.47 point margin (34.58% to 32.11%) (reftel).

3. (SBU) Only four polling firms -- Poliarquia (hired exclusively by paper-of-record "La Nacion"), Giacobbe, Isonomia, and Management and Fit -- accurately predicted de Narvaez's first-place finish in Buenos Aires Province. Poliarquia, led by Sergio Berensztein and Fabian Perechodnik, was the first to do so, with the results that "La Nacion" published June 7. Its June 21 poll also came closest in predicting Union-PRO's eventual 2.5 percentage point margin of victory. Isonomia's poll published June 26 anticipated Union-PRO's results most accurately, saying it would win with 34.7% of the vote with a two-point margin of victory over Nestor Kirchner's FpV slate. These firms, however, underestimated by an average of six points the results for the Radical Party and Civic Coalition (UCR-CC) slate led by Margarita Stolbizer (whose electoral support was also seriously underestimated by the polls in her 2007 gubernatorial bid). Ricardo Rouvier and Associates (often used by the Casa Rosada was the closest to estimating the UCR-CC's actual support. (In other respects, though, Rouvier was way off, for example predicting Nestor Kirchner's slate would win by 5.7 points.)

4. (SBU) In its July 3rd edition, news magazine "Noticias" ranked the overall performance of the country's ten leading pollsters in predicting the electoral results. (Note: "Noticias" is owned by Jorge Fontevecchia, who is anti-Kirchner and for this reason

receives no subsidies from the government, unlike most Argentine media.) On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the best possible score, Management and Fit held the top position (8.9), followed by Giacobbe (8.5), Authentic Opinion (8.1), Poliarquia (7.9), Isonomia (7.9), Equis (6.2), CEOP (5.5), Ibarometro (4.5), Ricardo Rouvier (4.2), and Analogias (3.5). The magazine ranked the pollsters by comparing their projections with the actual results, and a double penalty was given to predictions off by more than 5 points.

15. (SBU) A previous issue of "Noticias" alleged that the Kirchners may have sought to manipulate the results of published polls. It claimed the Casa Rosada paid polling firms 50,000 pesos (estimated USD 13,133) for each poll and directed them to produce results for publication that showed the FpV in the lead, with the intention of shaping public opinion rather than measuring it. (Note: The FpV, like its political party competitors, also commissioned surveys for private consumption, which may have given the Kirchners a more accurate picture of the electoral race.) The magazine claimed that the Buenos Aires provincial government hired Analogias and owed the firm 280,000 pesos (approximately USD 73,714); while Equis had a contract with the Casa Rosada worth 585,000 pesos (approximately USD 154,015). Major pollster Manuel Mora y Araujo (Ipsos) privately circulated results that differed significantly from what he published. The Embassy saw an unpublished Ipsos poll that showed Francisco de Narvaez ahead of Nestor Kirchner by five points; at the same time, media were reporting that Ipsos gave Kirchner a four-point lead. (Note: Ipsos has conducted multiple polls for the State Department over the last decade.)

16. (SBU) In Buenos Aires City, the country's second largest electoral district, all polling firms predicted that Republican Proposal's slate (PRO) led by former City mayor Gabriela Michetti would win by a larger margin than it ultimately received. Polling firms Julio Aurelio (hired by the PRO), Poliarquia, Analogias, and Ibarometro most accurately anticipated the City results, and were the only ones to predict a strong second place showing for leftist filmmaker Pino Solanas, who beat the UCR-CC's slate, surprising Argentina's political class. Analogias, Ibarometro, and Poliarquia were also the closest to estimating the final numbers for Pino, Michetti, and Prat-Gay.

Comment

17. (SBU) Unlike in the United States, where the most widely reported polls are those conducted by a few well-known, experienced, reputable firms, often in conjunction with major media organizations, in Argentina there has been a proliferation of pollsters, some of them highly questionable fly-by-night ventures. Argentine media often report "polls" conducted by new, unknown pollsters with no discernible track record as if they had equal standing with more reliable firms. In that regard, we view "Noticias" efforts to rank pollsters as a positive step forward. Political surveys in Argentina are additionally challenging because of the multiplicity of parties and candidates. To help Washington readers assess future polls, we offer this report card on Argentine pollsters but note that even pollsters who deciphered the support for the top two tickets were not very accurate on the rest of the line-up. Throughout this electoral season, polls portrayed the FpV and the Union-PRO in a statistical dead heat when the margin of error was taken into account -- and, indeed, the most closely watched race of Buenos Aires province turned out to be very close. Poliarquia, with its findings published June 7 in "La Nacion," deserves kudos for being the first major pollster to go public with findings that favored de Narvaez over Nestor Kirchner. At the same time, serious questions remain regarding the role of political manipulation, flawed or tailored methodologies, or the unpredictability of Argentina's electorate as key factors behind the faulty predictions of some of the country's leading polling firms.

Kelly